

Message Text

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ACTION AF-08

INFO OCT-01 EUR-12 IO-13 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00
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FM AMEMBASSY LONDON
TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 2410
INFO AMEMBASSY PRETORIA
AMEMBASSY MAPUTO
AMEMBASSY DAR ES SALAAM
AMEMBASSY LAGOS
AMEMBASSY LUSAKA
AMEMBASSY NAIROBI
AMEMBASSY KINSHASA
AMEMBASSY GABORONE
AMCONSUL CAPE TOWN
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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 LONDON 05685

FOR EMBASSY CAPE TOWN

E.O. 11652: N/A
TAGS: PFOR, RH, UK
SUBJECT: FINANCIAL TIMES ARTICLE

1. THE FOLLOWING ARTICLE BY BRIDGET BLOOM APPEARED IN
THE APRIL 5 EDITION OF "THE FINANCIAL TIMES" UNDER THE
HEADLINE, "OWEN OFFERS FRESH CONFERENCE TO END RHODESIA
DEADLOCK".

2. BEGIN TEXT: DR. DAVID OWEN, THE FOREIGN SECRETARY,
IS TO PROPOSE THAT BRITAIN SHOULD CONVENE AND CHAIR A
CONFERENCE TO DRAW UP A CONSTITUTION FOR AN INDEPENDENT
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BLACK-RULED RHODESIA WHEN HE MEETS BLACK AND WHITE
LEADERS IN SOUTHERN AFRICA NEXT WEEK.
THE CONFERENCE, TO WHICH AFRICAN AND WHITE RHODESIAN
LEADERS WOULD BE INVITED, IS THE CENTERPIECE OF A NEW
BRITISH STRATEGY WHICH, IT IS HOPED, WILL BREAK THE
DEADLOCK ON RHODESIA CAUSED BY LAST JANUARY'S COLLAPSE
OF THE GENEVA CONFERENCE.

THE EMBRYO STRATEGY, WHICH WOULD LEAVE DISCUSSION OF THE MOST CONTENTIOUS ISSUES IN RHODESIA TO A LATER STAGE, IS BEING BACKED BY MR. CYRUS VANCE, THE US SECRETARY OF STATE, WITH WHOM DR. OWEN DISCUSSED IT IN DETAIL IN LONDON LAST FRIDAY.

HE IS EXPECTED TO PUT THE IDEA OF A CONSTITUTIONAL CONFERENCE TO THE PRESIDENTS OF FOUR OF THE FIVE FRONT-LINE AFRICAN STATES, THE SOUTH AFRICAN AND RHODESIAN PRIME MINISTERS AND RHODESIAN AFRICAN LEADERS WHEN HE IS IN AFRICA NEXT WEEK.

DR. OWEN'S PURPOSE IN PROPOSING A CONSTITUTIONAL CONFERENCE, AS DISTINCT FROM A CONFERENCE TO DISCUSS INTERIM ARRANGEMENTS FOR THE RAPID TRANSFER OF POWER FROM THE WHITE MINORITY GOVERNMENT TO THE AFRICAN NATIONALISTS, IS TO TRY TO AVOID THE PITFALLS OF THE PLAN DEVISED BY DR. HENRY KISSINGER--AND SINCE REJECTED BY THE FRONT-LINE STATES--AND THE SUBSEQUENT BRITISH-CHAired GENEVA CONFERENCE.

IN GENEVA, MR. IAN SMITH, THE RHODESIAN PRIME MINISTER, DID NOT APPEAR READY TO CEDE POWER, AND THUS EVOKED THE DISTRUST OF THE NATIONALISTS, WHILE THE NATIONALISTS THEMSELVES WERE RAPIDLY GETTING INVOLVED IN AN INTER-AFRICAN CONTEST FOR POWER IN THE INTERIM GOVERNMENT. WHILE MOST OBSERVERS OF THE RHODESIAN SCENE REMAIN HIGHLY SKEPTICAL OF THE POSSIBILITY OF A NEGOTIATED SETTLEMENT, IT IS ARGUED IN LONDON AND WASHINGTON THAT SOME NEW EFFORT MUST BE MADE IN RHODESIA IF THE MOMENTUM ONCE ACHIEVED BY THE KISSINGER PLAN AND GENEVA CONFERENCE IS NOT TOTALLY TO BE DISSIPATED.

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IT IS ALSO HOPED THAT DISCUSSION OF A CONSTITUTION WOULD BE LESS DIVISIVE THAN DISCUSSION OF THE IMMEDIATE TRANSFER OF POWER. THIS QUESTION WOULD ONLY BE BROACHED IF AGREEMENT WAS FIRST REACHED ON AN INDEPENDENCE CONSTITUTION.

DETAILS OF THE CONSTITUTION ITSELF WOULD COME UP ONLY AT A CONFERENCE. SUBJECTS TO BE DISCUSSED WOULD INCLUDE SUCH MATTERS AS WHETHER RHODESIA WOULD BE A REPUBLIC WITHIN THE COMMONWEALTH, OR WOULD HAVE AN EXECUTIVE PRESIDENT OR BE A MULTI-PARTY STATE, AS WELL AS MORE CONTROVERSIAL ELEMENTS LIKE ENTRENCHED RIGHTS, WHETHER FOR A MINORITY OR THE POPULATION AS A WHOLE.

WHILE A GREAT DEAL WILL DEPEND ON DR. OWEN'S DISCUSSIONS IN AFRICA, THE UK GOVERNMENT WOULD LIKE TO BE ABLE TO ANNOUNCE AGREEMENT IN PRINCIPLE WITHIN A MONTH OR SO. AND TO HAVE A CONFERENCE CONVENED, EITHER IN LONDON OR ELSEWHERE, IN JUNE OR JULY.

CLEARLY IT WOULD BE AN ADVANTAGE FOR MR. JAMES CALLAGHAN TO BE ABLE TO TELL HIS COMMONWEALTH COLLEAGUES

WHEN THEY MEET IN LONDON IN EARLY JUNE THAT BRITAIN IS
TAKING ITS RESPONSIBILITIES TOWARDS RHODESIA SERIOUSLY.
BUT WHILE THE AIM OF THE NEW ANGLO-US STRATEGY IS TO
TRY TO ACHIEVE A BREAK WITH THE PAST. IT IS RECOGNIZED

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IN BOTH LONDON AND WASHINGTON THAT THE ODDS ARE STILL
HEAVILY STACKED AGAINST A SUCCESSFUL SETTLEMENT IN
RHODESIA.
THE FOREIGN OFFICE CONTINUES TO INSIST THAT DR. OWEN'S
FORTHCOMING VISIT TO AFRICA IS MERELY A FACT FINDING
EXERCISE. BUT DR. OWEN IN A TELEVISION INTERVIEW AT THE
WEEKEND, DESCRIBED IN BROAD TERMS THE CHANCES OF ANY NEW
INITIATIVE IN RHODESIA AS BEING VERY SLIGHT.
ALTHOUGH SOME NATIONALISTS HAVE BEEN CALLING FOR A
CONSTITUTIONAL CONFERENCE FOR AT LEAST TWO YEARS, THE
FIRST PROBLEM MAY BE ATTENDANCE. DR. OWEN INTENDS TO

INVITE ALL FOUR NATIONALIST GROUPS PRESENT AT GENEVA,
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EVEN THOUGH HE WILL MAKE CLEAR THAT THE CONFERENCE IS IN
NO SENSE A CONTINUATION OF GENEVA.

HE WILL HOPE THAT THE FRONT-LINE PRESIDENTS WILL EN-
DORSE HIS INVITATIONS, EVEN THOUGH THEY HAVE SAID THAT
THEY NOW EXCLUSIVELY BACK THE PATRIOTIC FRONT LED BY
MR. JOSHUA NKOMO AND MR. ROBERT MUGABE.

BISHOP ABEL MUZOREWA, WHOSE AFRICAN NATIONAL
COUNCIL IS CITED AS THE MOST LIKELY TO NEGOTIATE AN IN-
TERNAL SETTLEMENT WITH MR. SMITH (AN ALTERNATIVE FIRMLY
REJECTED BY LONDON AND WASHINGTON) IS TO MEET DR. OWEN
IN LONDON ON THURSDAY. MR. NKOMO MAY ALSO BE HERE THIS
WEEK.

HOWEVER, IT IS BELIEVED THAT ALL THE NATIONALISTS,
INCLUDING THE PATRIOTIC FRONT, WOULD WELCOME A CON-
STITUTIONAL CONFERENCE, IF ONLY BECAUSE THEY ARE THOUGHT
TO BE WORRIED AT THE LOSS OF POLITICAL AND MILITARY
MOMENTUM SINCE GENEVA.

THERE SEEMS TO BE TWO SCHOOLS OF THOUGHT, PERHAPS
REPRESENTING SOME DIFFERENCES BETWEEN WASHINGTON AND
LONDON, AS TO WHETHER MR. SMITH WOULD ATTEND--THOUGH HE
WILL CERTAINLY BE INVITED.

ONE IS THAT HE WILL ACCEPT, BUT WILL USE THE CON-
FERENCE AS A MEANS TO DELAY MAJORITY RULE FURTHER,
BACKED UP BY THE KNOWLEDGE THAT SETTLEMENT TALKS OF ANY
KIND TEND TO BOOST WHITE MORALE IN RHODESIA. IF THIS
WERE TO HAPPEN, IT IS FEARED THAT THE NEW INITIATIVE
COULD PROVE COUNTERPRODUCTIVE.

THE OTHER SUGGESTION IS THAT MR. SMITH MAY NOT COME
AND THAT THIS MIGHT BE BENEFICIAL. THERE IS A GROWING
BELIEF BOTH IN LONDON AND WASHINGTON THAT HE HAS NO IN-
TENTION OF HANDING OVER REAL POWER. A CONSTITUTIONAL
CONFERENCE COULD BE USED TO ISOLATE HIM IN THE HOPE
THAT OTHER WHITES, READIER TO NEGOTIATE, WILL EMERGE IN
SALISBURY.

THIS AGREEMENT IS OPEN TO THE IMMEDIATE OBJECTION
THAT THERE IS NO POINT IN TALKING OF A SETTLEMENT UNLESS
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THE MAN WHO WIELDS EFFECTIVE POWER NOW IS INVOLVED.

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